

# Knut Hamsun: The Soul of Norway

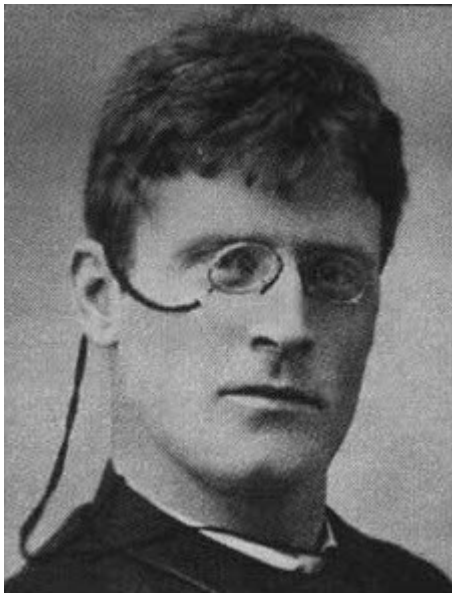
## Profiles in History

### [Stephen Goodson](#)

Knut Hamsun<sup>[1],[2]</sup> ranks as one of the most influential and innovative European authors of all time. On December 10, 1920 his literary career was crowned with the award of the Nobel Prize for literature by the Swedish Academy for his monumental work, *Growth of the Soil*. His attachment to the land and family as a counterpoint to industrialization and consumerism and his literary reflections thereon have lost none of their validity today. Throughout his life, expressed in both his actions and writings, Hamsun held firm to his beliefs and principles, which by today's convoluted standards would be deemed to be politically incorrect.

Hamsun was born on August 4, 1859 as Knud Pedersen in Lom, Gulbrandsdal, in south central Norway. He was the fourth son of seven children of an impoverished peasant family. In 1868 at the age of nine he was sent to work on his uncle, Hans Olsen's farm at Hamsund, north of the Arctic Circle. His uncle also ran the local post office and library, where Hamsun educated himself. His uncle treated him very badly, which ill treatment he later claimed to have caused him chronic nervous difficulties.

In 1874 aged 15 he escaped back to his parents' home in Lom, where he was employed in a variety of occupations, which included working as a store clerk, peddler, shoemaker's apprentice, assistant to a sheriff and elementary schoolteacher.



*Knut Hamsun in 1890. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons*

In 1876 he became apprenticed to a rope maker and a year later he had his first novel *Den Gaadefulde. En kjoerlighedshistorie fra Nordland (The Enigmatic One)*, a love story, published, but it gained little attention.

In the 1880s large numbers of Norwegians were emigrating to America and he travelled there twice, first in 1882. He spent several years working, mainly in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and traversing the country, often identifying with workers and social outcasts. He soon became disillusioned with America, its lack of culture and its obsession with materialism. In 1889 he wrote about his experiences in *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandslev (On the Cultural Life of Modern America)*, where he expressed his contempt for the mob politics of democracy and the worshipping of mammon. He was deeply concerned about the presence of the Negro population and advocated its repatriation to Africa.<sup>[3]</sup> He described the Civil War as a war by northern capitalists against aristocrats and wrote that, "Instead of founding an intellectual elite, America has established a mulatto stud farm".<sup>[4]</sup>

His first work to receive widespread recognition was *Sult (Hunger)* a 1890 semi-autobiographical account of an itinerant wanderer who suffers both intellectual and physical hunger in the cities, but recovers and is rejuvenated in the bucolic world of fields and forests. He would repeat this theme in his later novels *Mysterier (Mysteries)* (1892), the naturalist ode *Pan* (1894) and *Under Hovstjoernen. En Vandrers Fortoelling (Under the Autumn Star)* (1896).

Hamsun was severely disturbed and outraged by the calculated, vindictive and cruel treatment meted out by the English to the innocent Boers (farmers) in the Jewish-instigated Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).<sup>[5]</sup> In an unprecedented scorched-earth policy, the English razed the Boers' homesteads, slaughtered their cattle (mainly by cutting their tendons "to save ammunition"), and raped their women. The English destroyed twenty-five towns and their contents. They herded 136,000 women and children into 46 concentration camps and housed in tents, where in some camps during winter, temperatures plummeted to freezing. 27,927 <sup>[6]</sup> of them died of starvation and exposure, of whom 22,074 or 79% were under the age of 16. Henceforth Hamsun would adopt an anti-English stance for the rest of his life.

In *En Vandrør spiller med Sordin (A Wanderer Plays on Muted Strings)* (1909) Hamsun started to introduce political themes, viewing the migration of country folk to the cities, not as a form of progress, but as a debasement of both their souls and morals. In *A Word to Us*, he condemned dependency on tourism as a degrading form of employment, and advocated not only a return to the land, but the cessation of emigration, particularly to America.

Hamsun supported Germany during World War One and viewed the Germans as a *herrenvolk* (a superior people), who shared a common culture and heritage with Norway. Not surprisingly, his books were immensely popular in Germany.

In 1917 he wrote *Markens Grode (Growth of the Soil)* a novel, which evinces his vision of how an ideal society should function in a rural environment. This work created a worldwide sensation and 18,000 copies of the first edition were sold out in three weeks. Dr. Joseph Goebbels was greatly moved by this masterpiece of European literature and in World War Two ordered the printing of a special edition, which was distributed to soldiers in the field.<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1918 Hamsun bought a rundown manor house, "Norholm", and 800 acres situated between Lillesand and Grimstad. He lived there with his second wife, an actress, Marie (nee Andersen), who was 27 years younger than he, and his four children, sons Tore and Arild and daughters Elinor and Cecilia. With the prize money from the Nobel, he was able to restore the house and turn the property into a model dairy farm.

In between his farming activities, Hamsun completed *Konerne ved Vandposten (The Woman at the Pump)*, in which he criticized the over-intellectualization of an urban existence and advocated a return to the normality of rural life. In the *August* trilogy published in 1930, he continued to explore these themes of alienation, spiritual impoverishment and hopelessness in an urban environment. It may also be mentioned that Hamsun was against any notions of what is today known as feminism.

Hamsun received a number of other awards, including honorary membership in the Moscow Arts Theatre after the performance of his play *Livet I Vold (In the Grip of Life)*, which had been written in 1910, and the Goethe Institute Prize in 1934. However, he rarely accepted prize money and refused numerous doctorates in literature, explaining that he was a farmer and an author, and did not have an academic background.

Along with the rest of the developed world, Norway was severely affected by the “Great Depression”<sup>[8]</sup> of the 1930s, with unemployment rising to 30.8% in 1932 – the second highest in the world after Denmark at 31.7%.<sup>[9]</sup>

In response to this situation of economic misery, violent strikes and unrest, a former Minister of Defense (1931-33), Vidkun Quisling, established a new political party, *Nasjonal Samling (National Gathering)* in May 1933. He sought to address this chaotic situation, which had been aggravated by moral decadence, political expediency and racial degradation, by unifying the Norwegian people with the implementation of a program of reconstruction based on social equality, in which the peasant farmer would play a central role.<sup>[10]</sup>

Quisling had previously assisted the famous explorer Fridtjof Nansen in a relief program in the Ukraine from 1921-23 and he was thus fully apprised of the horrors of Jewish Bolshevism, which he revealed in a book *Russia and Us* written in 1932. Not unexpectedly, Norway’s communists loathed Quisling.

Hamsun had much sympathy for these policies of Quisling, and although he never joined the party, he contributed to its journal *Fritt Folk (Free People)*. He was an ardent supporter of National Socialism and viewed it as a means for the regeneration of the true European way of life.<sup>[11]</sup> He also advocated the emigration of all the Jews of Europe to a homeland of their own.<sup>[12]</sup>

On April 8, 1940, Winston Churchill, the warmonger and puppet of the international bankers,<sup>[13]</sup> who was at the time First Sea Lord of the British Admiralty, violated Norwegian neutrality by ordering the mining of Norwegian territorial waters and the occupation of Narvik in northern Norway. In order to protect the flow of its essential iron ore imports from Kiruna northern Sweden, Germany was forced to react. In a few brief battles the Germans routed the British army at Narvik and Trondheim and Norway would remain under German occupation until the end of World War II on May 8, 1945.

After the Norwegian king and his government, headed by the president of the Storting (parliament) the Jew C. J. Hambro, had cowardly fled, Quisling was compelled to fill the vacuum they left. He was initially appointed prime minister, but his firm resolve to adopt an independent policy resulted in the Germans replacing him with *Reichskommissar* Josef Terboven (1898-1945) on April 24, 1940. Eventually after the *Nasjonal Samling* party gained one third of the seats in a new parliament, Quisling became minister president on February 1, 1942, but he remained frequently at odds with the German occupiers.

Hamsun urged Norwegians to support Quisling, whom he deemed the best person to obtain full independence from Germany and the status of neutrality during World War Two. In a long article in the

February edition of the German-language *Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Journal* of February 1942, in which he attacked Franklin Roosevelt for being a puppet of the Jews, he wrote, "Europe does not want either the Jew or their gold, neither the Americans nor their country."[\[14\]](#)

Hamsun was an honorary member of the Volunteer Legion *Norwegen* and wore its uniform on official occasions. His son Arild served with the Legion and the *Waffen-SS* and was decorated with the Iron Cross, second class.[\[15\]](#)

In an act of solidarity with Germany, Hamsun donated his gold[\[16\]](#) Nobel medal to *Reichsminister* of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, Dr. Joseph Goebbels. On June 26, 1943 Hamsun met Adolf Hitler at the Berghof in the Obersalzberg. According to Christa Schroeder, Hitler's secretary,

*"During a meal Baldur von Schirach had mentioned Hamsun's visit to the Journalists' Congress in Vienna and urged Hitler to invite the Norwegian to the Berghof. After initial reluctance Hitler agreed and Knut Hamsun came. During the conversation between Hamsun and Hitler, Dara Christian and I heard a heated exchange – we were in the lounge, which separated from the Great Hall only by a curtain. Holding our breath we crept closer. Hamsun had had the gall to take Hitler to task over the measures introduced by Gauleiter Terboven in Norway, urging in emotional tones that Terboven be recalled. Maybe he was rather deaf, or possibly because Hitler would not tolerate contradiction, we heard Hitler shout at him: 'Be silent! You know nothing about it!'"*[\[17\]](#)

Hitler had expected that they would have a polite conversation about art and writing; instead he was confronted with a raft of complaints. Apparently this was the only time Hitler had ever been contradicted in such a determined manner.

Notwithstanding this rebuff, Hamsun continued to support Germany and received from Hitler birthday greetings when he turned 85 in 1944. After Hitler had committed suicide on April 30, 1945 Hamsun wrote the following eulogy in the *Aftenposten* (*The Evening Post*), Norway's largest newspaper, of May 7, 1945:

*"I am not worthy to speak his name out loud. Nor do his life and his deeds warrant any kind of sentimental discussion. He was a warrior, a warrior of mankind, and a prophet of the gospel of justice for all nations. He was a reforming nature of the highest order, and his fate was to arise in a time of unparalleled barbarism which finally failed him. Thus might the average western European regard Hitler. We, his closest supporters, now bow our heads at his death."*

Shortly after the end of World War Two, Hamsun was arrested, and although he was still recovering from a second stroke, was sent to a lunatic asylum for observation.[\[18\]](#) The psychiatrists assessed that he was not insane, but permanently impaired mentally. He was then put on trial in 1947 and fined 425,000 kroner, which was later reduced to 325,000 kroner.[\[19\]](#) His wife was sentenced to three years at hard labor.

In 1949 he wrote his last work, *Paa gjengrodde Stier* (*On Overgrown Paths*), in which he vehemently criticized the psychiatrists and judges who had persecuted him, and thereby disproved his alleged insanity. It became an immediate bestseller.

This outrageous treatment of an old and venerable man has brought nothing but eternal shame to Norway. The Danish novelist Thorkild Hansen (1927-89), who investigated the trial, commented in his book *Processen mod Hamsun (The Hamsun Trial)* in 1978, "If you want to meet idiots, go to Norway."

Knut Hamsun was much admired and in many instances imitated by an array of distinguished authors and philosophers such as Bertolt Brecht, Andre Gide, Maxim Gorky, Ernest Hemingway, Herman Hesse, Franz Kafka, Arthur Koestler, Thomas Mann, Henry Miller, Alfred Rosenberg and H. G. Wells. He was condemned to spend his final years on his farm in ignominy and poverty and died in his sleep in his 93rd year on 19 February 1952.

In 2009 the 150th anniversary of Hamsun's birth was marked by a partial rehabilitation of his reputation with the construction of a six-story Hamsun Center and a seven-foot statue in his birthplace Hamsund, as well as the issuance of a postage stamp.

Finally, we may contemplate Norway's evolution during the sixty years since Hamsun's death. Norway has one of the highest concentrations of foreigners in Europe at 601,000 or 12.2% out of a total population of 4.9 million. This is illustrated by the fact that currently 28% of births in Oslo are non-European and that the most common first name given to newborns is Mohammed. Today Islam is the second most popular religion (3.9%).[\[20\]](#)

Norway was one of the more prominent critics of White South Africa's policy of separate development, which had been successfully applied until the murder of Prime Minister Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd on September 6, 1966 at the behest of international bankers. Today Norway has multi-racial problems of a seemingly intractable nature.

Every year at Christmas the naïve Norwegians donate a large fir tree to England in gratitude for having "supported" them during World War Two. If England had invaded Norway, its occupation would have been little different from that of Germany's, and if the Norwegians had resisted, their fate would have been similar to that of the Boers.

Today it appears that Hamsun (and Quisling) were right, the Norwegian government was wrong, and Norwegians have much to learn and do if they wish to save their country.

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#### Notes:

- [\[1\]](#) King Haakon VII (1872-1957 once referred to Hamsun as "The Soul of Norway." He reigned from 1905-57.
- [\[2\]](#) Hamsun's first name is pronounced "Noot."
- [\[3\]](#) K. Bolton, *Historical Study Series, Knut Hamsun*, Renaissance Press, Paraparaumu Beach, New Zealand, p. 4.
- [\[4\]](#) Ibid. In book reviews of Inger Sletten Kolloen, *Knut Hamsun: Dreamer and Dissenter* (New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2009 ) and Monika Zagar, *The Dark Side of Literary Brilliance* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2009), the reviewer, Matthew Shaer, quotes Hamsun as follows: "(The Negroes are) a

people without a history, without traditions, without a brain," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2009. In November 2008 an allegedly foreign-born mulatto was elected president of the United States.

- [5] The pretext for starting the war viz. voting rights for the recently arrived immigrants was, in the words of Professor John Hobson, "entirely a sham grievance." The primary purpose was to seek control of the largest gold fields in the world for the benefit of the international banking fraternity led by the Rothschilds, whose system of fractional reserves enabled the creation of money out of nothing as interest-bearing debt. My grandmother, who lived in Germiston and was nine years old in 1899, once told me that it was a commonly held view in Transvaal that the Jews had started the Anglo-Boer War. Among the European volunteers there was *Het Skandinawiesche Vrijkorps* (The Scandinavian Corps), which was established on September 23, 1899 and comprised of over 200 volunteers from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Their first battle took place at Mafeking in October 1899. C. Nordbruch, *The European Volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Pretoria, Contact Publishers, 1999), p. 138.
- [6] A. Kok, *A Voice in the Dark* (Unpublished, 2010), p. 167.
- [7] According to an article by Walter Gibbs for the *New York Times*, February 27, 2009. The Nobel Prize is currently valued at 10,000,000 Swedish crowns or \$1.5 million.
- [8] The Great Depression was precipitated by the sudden withdrawal of credit by the US Federal Reserve Bank (57% owned by the Rothschilds) and other major Wall Street banks. In the ensuing slump these banks were able to purchase assets for pennies on the dollar. The United States economy was only able to recover from 1941 onwards after Japan had been deliberately provoked into declaring war on America. Germany and Japan on the other hand had started to create their own money free of interest in the early 1930s and had enjoyed huge levels of prosperity and full employment.
- [9] League of Nations, *World Economic Survey: Eighth Year, 1938/39* (Geneva 1939), p. 128.
- [10] M. McLaughlin, "The Epic of Vidkun Quisling," *The Barnes Review*, Vol. 9, No.5, September/October 2003, p. 7.
- [11] Gottfried Feder, *The Program of the NSDAP, The National Socialist German Workers' Party and Its General Conceptions*, translated by E.T.S. Dugdale, (Munich, Fritz Eher Verlag, 1932).
- [12] The Jewish Autonomous Oblast (province) of Birobidzhan in southeastern Russia created by Joseph Stalin as an exclusive home for Jews in 1928 is one example of the solutions being considered at this time.
- [13] In 1936 Churchill experienced severe financial difficulties and was bailed out by Banker Sir Henry Strakosch, who provided him with a non-repayable loan of £18,162 in order

to settle his outstanding debts. Churchill would thereafter strictly follow the dictates of the international bankers. He vigorously promoted a war psychosis. In July 1940 after the British and French armies had been defeated, he rejected a most reasonable and generous peace offer from Hitler, which with the benefit of hindsight may be construed as having been an act of racial suicide.

- [14] As quoted in K. Bolton, op.cit., p. 12.
- [15] R. Landwehr, "The European Volunteer Movement in World War II," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 61-2, online: [http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v02/v02p-59\\_Landwehr.html](http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v02/v02p-59_Landwehr.html)
- [16] It contained 192 grams of 23 carat gold and since 1980 the contents have been 196 grams of 18 carat gold.
- [17] C. Schroeder, *He Was My Chief*, (London, Frontline Books, 2009), pp. 169 -70.
- [18] K.Bolton, op.cit., p. 13.
- [19] According to the Price Calculator of Norges Bank (Central Bank of Norway) 325,000 Norwegian crowns is worth \$1,050,000 in today's values.
- [20] Wikipedia, "Demographics of Norway," online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Norway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Norway)

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<b>Title:</b>	Knut Hamsun: The Soul of Norway
<b>Sources:</b>	<i>Inconvenient History</i> , 5(2) (2013)
<b>Dates:</b>	published: 2013-07-01, first posted: 2014-02-20 00:00:00

<https://www.inconvenienthistory.com/5/2/3213>